

APPENDIX B

LEO STRAUSS: “RELIGIOUS SITUATION OF THE PRESENT” (1930)¹

Translated by Martin D. Yaffe

I would be facing an insoluble task if I had to report to you all that is being *written* about religion today; for *infinitely much* is being written: each day a new book, a new pamphlet, a new essay comes out concerning our question. The task would be simplified—and the simplification in our case amounts not so much to the temptation to give in to laziness as to an imperative of reason—if I limited myself to reporting what was being *thought* today, being thought *thoroughly*. For while there are many who write, there are few who think, who think thoroughly. I do not mean to claim that a necessary opposition exists between thinking and writing, although that claim might not be all that indefensible. I am happy to admit that there are a number of men who write after they have thought, have thought thoroughly. We need to concern ourselves with these men only.

Meanwhile a further restriction recommends itself. Most of even the thorough authors are apostles of a master. And here we keep to the proverb: “One does not go to the apprentice, but to the blacksmith.” It is indisputable that the kind of literature that advances the understanding of a great and deep mind, commentary, has a value that should not be disparaged. But the commentator is not the author. And in concerning ourselves with the religious situation of the present we do not want to become confused by the multitude of commentators, but to stick to the very few authors, to the *auctores* of the situation. {378}

We are interested in the religious situation of the present as *Jews*. For that reason we take a stronger interest in those authors who, being Jews, determine the present

¹ [“*Religiöse Lage der Gegenwart*,” in GS-2 377–91, 621.] Unpublished. Manuscript with 13 handwritten pages and inscribed cover, in ink with penciled supplements and corrections. On the cover Strauss has noted under the title: “Paper to be read on 21 December 1930 in the Kadimah Federation Camp in Brieslang near Berlin.” Leo Strauss Papers, Box 8, Folder 4, Department of Special Collections, University of Chicago Library. {HM}

Kadimah was a national student Zionist organization founded in Vienna in 1882 (and disbanded by the Nazis in 1938). Its Hebrew name means “Forward.”

situation. Of the Jewish writers of the present who are of interest in our context, the most important one by far is without any doubt Franz Rosenzweig.² I will therefore confine myself to a presentation of Franz Rosenzweig's doctrine. In the short time that I have, I would only cause confusion by giving a survey of the various theories. The thorough treatment of a work that is indicative of and peculiar to the present situation is much more suitable for our purpose.

However, I cannot even turn to my task limited in this limited way, I cannot begin my thus limited task in the right manner, so long as I have not clarified the topic itself. In this clarification it will turn out, however, that the topic is *not a serious* topic. That is why I divide my presentation into 2 parts:

1. Clarification of the topic;
2. Rosenzweig's doctrine and its difficulty.

The title of my presentation consists of four words—rather, since we can safely disregard the article “the,” of three: “Religious,” “Situation,” “Present.” We want to look at these three words in sequence in their context as determined by the topic.

1. *Religious Situation of the Present.* Obviously this does not mean in one particular respect: in the way that we can consider the situation of the present as conditioned by the Versailles Treaty, by the crisis of the world economy, by the Balfour Declaration, etc.; nor that the religious situation of the present is of the same order as the political, social, economic, technical, scientific, artistic situation. Instead what is meant is: the situation of the present in the *most important* respect. It is, for instance, unthinkable that the topic of your study group, the validity of norms, values, and laws, would *not* belong to our topic; rather, it essentially belongs to it. For that reason, for example, the philosophic situation should not be distinguished and excluded from the religious situation; but certainly the only reason why you did *not* say “*philosophic* situation of the present” was because otherwise there would have been the danger of letting loose a flood of incomprehensible technical terms. Avoiding this will be my most pressing concern. But the matter prohibits disregarding philosophy, {379} prohibits distinguishing between religion and philosophy in looking at the present religious situation. I therefore replace “religious situation of the present” with “*intellectual*³ situation of the present.”

2. *Intellectual Situation of the Present.* The expression is intelligible but inappropriate:⁴ the intellect is not a thing that is situated, or that could have a situation. The intellect is actual⁵ in seeing and searching, in believing, wishing and hoping, in demanding and giving an account, in responsibility, in questioning and answering. Now, questioning has priority over answering. God does not *question*,

² Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929), German-Jewish theologian, originator of the “new thinking” and leading advocate of the “movement of return” to Judaism; see Strauss, Preface to *SCR*, in *JPCM* 146–48 with 151–53, 453, 460.

³ Ger.: *geistige*. (The emphasis is Strauss's.)

⁴ Ger.: *uneigentlich*. Or: inauthentic. Likewise five sentences later in this paragraph. In that same sentence, “proper” is *eigentlich*, whose range of meanings includes “real,” “actual,” “true,” “appropriate,” and “authentic.”

⁵ Ger.: *wirklich*. Or: real.

although he does answer. Questioning is more characteristic of the human intellect than is answering. There is no answer without questioning,⁶ although there is questioning without answer. It may be that questioning is not the sufficient definition of the intellect—in any case, questioning is proper to the intellect and not, like the situation, inappropriate. We therefore now say: the intellectual *questioning* of the present. This expression has a pleonastic effect: although we speak of “the social question,” we do not speak of social questioning, etc. We therefore say: *the* questioning of the present. The questioning asks something; it asks a question;⁷ we grasp the questioning of others—in this case, of the present—from their question. We therefore say: *the* question of the present.

3. The Question of the *Present*. Let us imagine, in a fanciful manner, a Kadimah camp assembly in the twelfth century, in the century of R[abbi] M[oses] b[en] M[aimon],⁸ and that you had asked a student of the RMbM to speak to you so that he might help you, by means of what he has learned from his teacher, to free yourselves from your confusion and perplexity. What would he have spoken to you about? Creation, providence, the unity of reason and revelation. Hence, about *substantive* questions. In another age, one would probably have spoken about *other* questions, but always about substantive questions. Nobody would have minded whether or not they were questions of the *present*. At the time, they *were* questions of the *present* that were being dealt with, but they were not being dealt with *as* questions of the present. When we question, seriously question, we then *by that very fact* ask questions of the present. And if we pose *the* question that we are certain is *the* question, then we are asking *the* question of the present. We will therefore cross out “of the present” and say: *The* question. There can, however, be no doubt about what *the* question is that is and must be the most important one for us: it is the question, what is the *right* life? how *should* I {380} live? what matters?⁹ what is needful?¹⁰ Thus, our modern topic of the “religious situation of the present” boils down to the old, eternal question, *the* primordial question.

There is no doubt that this is the question for the sake of which you have posed the question concerning the religious situation of the present. For in order to learn the latest from the realm of intellect and wit, you did not need to travel from noisy Berlin to quiet Brieselang. But how does it come about, then, that the simple question poses itself not only to you but also to the present as such, as the question of the religious or intellectual situation of the present? This automatic alteration of the question takes place on account of an implicit or explicit, but in any case tyrannical, conviction: the conviction that the answer to the question could be gained solely or essentially from the knowledge and understanding of the present as it exists in the present. This conviction and its causes we have to consider first.

⁶ Or: questions.

⁷ Ger.: *Das Fragen fragt etwas, es fragt eine Frage*. Strauss's sentence has a Heideggerian formulation.

⁸ “RMbM” is the traditional Hebrew acronym for Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (i.e., Moses Maimonides). We have retained it here, along with Meier's bracketed interpolations. The acronym recurs in Strauss's next clause and later on.

⁹ Ger.: *worauf kommt es an?*

¹⁰ Ger.: *was tut not?*

If we pose the question concerning the right life unselfconsciously and naively, convinced that we can answer it if we make an honest effort and do not let ourselves be put off by any detour, then the present,¹¹ attired in the most splendid robes, confronts us with the raised eyebrows of a haughtily knowing, exalted personage and calls out to us:

Stop! You unsuspecting ones! Do you not know that the inexhaustible earth brings forth new generations year after year, which, barely having reached maturity, are all destined to charge with all the fire of youth directly at the truth, at *the* truth? This has now been happening for thousands of years. For thousands of years the attempt has been made, and time and again it has failed. At one time, later generations did not let themselves be confused by the failure of earlier ones; full of delusion they said to themselves, if they failed—perhaps they approached the issue the wrong way; let's just begin from the beginning; let's begin completely from the beginning. And they began from the beginning, and they also failed. The unhappy ones did not know—what I, the Present, the powerful goddess, know—that they *had* to fail. They had to fail since they were seeking *the* truth. For there is not *the one eternal* truth, but each age has *its* truth, and you, you 20-year-olds, you can reasonably seek only your truth, the truth of your age, my—the present's—truth. Being in full possession of *this* knowledge, which is {381} my greatest pride, I am allowed to smile at the past—at its naivety. I do not hide that my smile conceals a little *envy*: at the élan of youth, which, in the superiority that my knowledge gives me, I cannot permit myself: the long, magnificent robes that strike your eye would hinder me very much in an assault on the truth, which can only be dared in combat gear; I cannot go on the assault: I am stuck at the base; I do not hide that I am sometimes ashamed before the frontline soldiers; but then my good sense tells me: “You have no reason to be ashamed; the base is *your* virtue, *your* duty; you would be dishonest, you would be betraying yourself, if you, such an exalted, superior, refined personage, were to take on the dirt and hardship of the front lines. I have it much harder, since I, too, would rather go on the assault and cannot and must not.”—So, while my smile is not a naive smile at their naïveté, and is indeed a smile that is not without grief and shame, it is, at the same time, also not a poisonous smile: My smile is benevolent: I exculpate, I *justify*: I exculpate the earlier generations since they did against their will what I prescribe to my children. To be sure, they did seek *the* truth, but they found the truth without time;¹² they failed—measured by *their* standard; measured by *my* standard, they reached the goal. So now, enthroned high above the entire past, I call out to you: It is befitting for thinking beings to know what they are doing and what they can reasonably want: therefore, know and be imbued with it once and for all, that you can find only your truth, the truth of the present, and therefore can reasonably seek only it.

In this way the present speaks a lot to us, not through the mouth of stubborn goats in Scotland¹³ but through the mouth of the most agile, most progressive, most expert, most lively children of our time. So let us hear more closely what they are saying to us. We cannot seek *the* answer to our question, but only the answer for *us*, for the *present*. But where and how to find this answer? Surely not in the

¹¹ Or: the Present. Likewise in the following.

¹² Ger.: *ohne Zeit*.

¹³ This expression seems proverbial, with no literary antecedent.

study. No—only through coming to know the *powers* of the present! Where do we encounter these powers? In the struggle of parties, groups, trends, currents, etc. But are we supposed to hear what the truth of the present is from the cacophonous noise of the public? No—these conflicting trends do not harmonize on their own; their harmony {382} must first be produced by us. In what manner, though? The thoughtful person cannot devote himself completely¹⁴ to *one* trend; he sees all too clearly that in each of these trends are truth and untruth; hence he must try to do justice to all, to the truth in all. In short—what he needs is a “*synthesis*.”

Now then: 1) since everything human is historical, there is not *the* question, but always only the question of the *present*. In order to answer this question, or even just to pose it, we must know the situation of the present. 2) The situation of the present—that is, the factual, effective answers of the present. 3) The answer is given by a synopsis, σύνοψις, *conspectio*—conspectivism.¹⁵

1. Critique of Conspectivism.

α. The Incredible Difficulty of a Synthesis. Conspectivism is possible only because of the complete absence of a concrete notion of the emergence of a “position.” Every position that can at all be taken seriously is the work of an immense effort of an individual. When Kant—who already had achievements that by themselves would have made him immortal (Kant–Laplace theory), who was no inexperienced young man who yet had to acquire the necessary knowledge of facts—had accomplished the breakthrough to his position, he needed 11 years for the *Critique of Pure Reason*—not to write it, but just to think it. Let us assume that something similar goes for Marx or for Nietzsche. These men came to completely different results with their immense efforts. What an exponential effort it would take to find a position from which both positions were unified! How much deeper would someone have to descend in order to find the common point from which.... One need only imagine these difficulties in order to comprehend that the people who today talk of synthesis simply do not mean¹⁶ anything by it. But they must mean something by it! As it seems to me, conspectivism comes about in the following manner.

β. The Genesis of Conspectivism from the reader turned writer. The originators of positions have laid down the results of their {383} immense effort in published books. Everyone can buy these books or have them given to him as a gift or borrow them and then read them. Now, there are two types of readers. Some are narrowminded; they have a fixed and ready opinion; they read only in order to confirm their opinion: should the book *not* be of their opinion, they have enough arguments ready-at-hand to dismiss the book. For, what aren’t there arguments for; certain fundamental insights of Kant’s, which today any jackass has or believes he has, were “refuted” with sovereign superiority by jackasses among Kant’s contemporaries. This type of reader is harmless and innocuous. More harmful is the second type. To this type belong people who are stimulated by the books, who are open to everything new; these people are easily excited; they adopt one book’s conclusions

¹⁴ Ger.: mit Haut und Haar.

¹⁵ Ger.: Konspektivismus. Compare the following with Strauss’s unpublished review by this title, translated in appendix A, above.

¹⁶ Lit.: think. Likewise in the next sentence.

and then again another's. Since they are precisely *not* narrow, they cannot resist the conflicting theories. The theories can be formulated in certain keywords; these keywords can easily be adopted. One reads and reflects while reading; it occurs to one how things are related; one sits down and writes. The result of this very entertaining activity is a synthesis, that is, a book or a pamphlet or an essay. That is the essence of the conspectivist spirit.¹⁷ the conspectivist spirit is the lazy reader turned writer.

γ. Sham Understanding. In truth, one understands nothing conspectively, even if one is very bright. I want to give an example. In our time, somewhere there lives a philosopher in the full sense of the word.¹⁸ Completely unknown just five years ago, today his name and work are talked of everywhere. This philosopher in his main work has, among other things, written a few pages about idle talk, what it means and what it inflicts.¹⁹ That was meant as a, so to speak, purely factual statement, not as the author's appeal to spare him from idle talk. What happened? A woman²⁰—the noble word “lady” obviously forbids itself—reads this philosopher, and before she can even have the slightest idea of what the man really means, she goes around in London and yaks and yaks. She found the paragraph on idle talk certainly “very fine”; she has understood him in *this* sense; but she did not understand him in such a way that she would finally, finally shut her unbearable trap.

Therefore: if one takes *seriously* the great men who dominate the present, then one will not wish to attempt a synthesis, which amounts to muddling and diluting what was important to them. It {384} is preferable to despair in light of their contradiction than to give in to a stale and cowardly mishmash.

2. *The Situation of the Present can be grasped*²¹ *in the totality of the positions effective in the present.* Why *all* these positions? Because they are *equivalent*. Why are they equivalent? Because each one sees facts that the others do not see, or see indistinctly. But obviously it appears not to be important to see *everything* equally distinctly—but to see what is important distinctly and what is not important indistinctly. We must therefore already know beforehand what is important. One answers: what is important is the *total situation* of the present: what matters is the totality. The reason why individual positions cannot convince one another, cannot do justice to one another, is that they are not total.²² But is “justice” what matters simply? Is not “injustice” vis-à-vis what is not true truly just? Cannot the total view be supremely unjust? In truth, *all* views are total.

But assuming that a synthesis were possible and that all the positions effective in the present were equivalent: would it therefore be necessarily so that the synthesis actually conceived *the* situation of the present? For is it necessary that *all* viewpoints, that the *true* viewpoint be contained in the present viewpoints in such a way that it results from their synthesis? Is it not possible that *all* present standpoints

¹⁷ German: *Geistes*. Except where otherwise noted, *Geist* and its cognates are “intellect” and its cognates.

¹⁸ The reference is to Martin Heidegger. See the following note.

¹⁹ Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* §35 (10th ed.; 167–70)

²⁰ Ger.: *Weib*. In the next clause, “lady” is *Frau*.

²¹ Ger.: *ist fassbar*. Later in this subsection, “view” is *Auffassung*, and “viewpoint” is *Gesichtspunkt*.

²² Ger.: *untotal*.

rest on a mistaking of the fundamental facts? Are not perhaps all these standpoints “ideologies”? This is in no way settled. If we want to come to know the present just as it *is*, free from the dominant views, which we must first examine, then we must first of all be free of the present. This freedom does not fall into our laps; we must win it for ourselves.

3. *Necessity of the Naivety of the Questioning.* But is it true at all that we have to come to know the situation of the present in the first place? From mankind’s always having a present, it nevertheless does not follow that one need be concerned with it: our *fate is not our task*. This is the principal mistake to which today’s man keeps succumbing: the attempt to determine the task from the fate. This attempt is absurd if there is *no* God: then fate is chance, and if God *is*, then fate is providence, and we are not allowed to want to play God. This error manifests itself also in the will to synthesis: even if each standpoint may *be* a synthesis *in fact*—it is nonetheless *never willed as a synthesis*; what has been willed is always the *truth*. {385} We have to look ahead; we *never* come to know what we have to do by being reflective.

We want to do justice to the matter, then.²³ We turn to the matter,²⁴ that is, the question concerning the right life, with the will to answering it. But in order not to suffer shipwreck as thousands have suffered shipwreck *before* us, we do want to hear the *warning* of the present, the call: watch out. We will not listen to the present if it turns this failure into a theory, if it asserts the *inevitability* of failure. In order to be able to get beyond the present, we must take the warning of the present seriously, we must be in a position to interpret more closely the experience on which the present insists. We therefore do not ask about the *present*, but about the *warning* of the present. But in this warning we let ourselves encounter the present. We thus admit: failure will certainly not have been accidental, due to individual inadequacy, to the stupidity of earlier generations; it will have its *serious* reasons. In order to understand these serious reasons, we must take seriously the question about them, we must not truncate this question by the dogmatic assertion that there are no eternal truths.

By the way, what about the historical *experience* of this failure?

The question was posed for the first time by Socrates. Whether and in what sense he himself gave an answer is obscure. In any case, his student Plato answered it: in the *Republic*.²⁵ In order to illustrate the difficulty of true understanding, Plato in this work compares the situation of human beings to the situation of cave dwellers: a cave with a long entry stretching upwards; the human beings from childhood on are bound inside the cave by chains around their thighs and necks; they thus always remain in the same place, and they are prevented by their neck chains from turning their heads around; from above a firelight shines from a distance; above, between the fire and the prisoners runs a walkway, alongside which runs a wall; along this wall human beings carry all sorts of artifacts, statues, etc.; it appears that the prisoners there can see only the shadows of those artifacts, which are cast by the fire’s light

²³ Ger.: *Wir wollen also sachlich sein.*

²⁴ Ger.: *Sache.*

²⁵ See, for the following, *Republic* 514a–517a.

onto the cave's wall facing them; to them, therefore, the shadows would be the true things. Now, if one of them were unchained and put into a position to gaze freely up toward the light, which however could happen only under great pain {386}, he would, being blinded by the glow, be incapable of recognizing the things whose shadows he had seen before; he would be at a complete loss if he were told that now he was seeing the things whose shadows he had been seeing until now; above all, the very sight of the light would pain him so much that he would turn away and want again to retreat into the dark of the cave; and it would require a long habituation and effort, indeed the use of force, for him to be capable of seeing the true things, of living in the light of the truth. Brought back into the cave, he would retain the memory of his life in the light, but would be completely incomprehensible and laughable to his companions precisely because of this. Thus Plato presents the difficulties of philosophizing, the *natural* difficulties. If they are so extraordinary, is it any wonder that there are so many conflicting opinions? Bearing in mind the Platonic parable, we will not be misled by the anarchy of opinions, but will have to exert ourselves as much as possible to get out of the cave.

We said: Plato presents the *natural* difficulties of philosophizing. That is, those difficulties natural to man as man, as a sensitive-intellectual being, the difficulties that according to the Platonic view are given by his sensitivity.²⁶ We say "natural" because there are difficulties that are not "natural" but become effective only under certain presuppositions. RMbM in *Moreh Nebuchim*²⁷ (I 31) expands the enumeration of reasons given by a Greek philosopher for the differences of opinion in philosophy, and therefore for the difficulty of philosophy simply, by a fourth reason; about this he says, literally:

In our time there exists a fourth reason, which he [*sc.*, Alexander of Aphrodisias] did not mention, since it did not exist among them; namely, *habituation* and *schooling*; for human beings by nature love what they are habituated to and incline to it;...thus it happens to man regarding the opinions with which he has grown up: he loves them and holds on to them and keeps away from deviant opinions. For this reason as well, then, man is prevented from coming to know the truth. Thus it happens to the multitude regarding God's corporeality...on account of habituation to *writings* in which they firmly believe and to which they are habituated, whose wording seems to indicate God's corporeality.

Let us sum up: by the fact that a tradition resting on revelation has entered the world of philosophy, the difficulty of philosophizing is fundamentally augmented {387}, the *freedom* of philosophizing fundamentally limited.

In RMbM's remark, the struggle of the entire last 3 centuries, the struggle of the Enlightenment, is in a sense sketched, outlined: in order to render possible philosophy in its natural difficulty, the artificial difficulty of philosophizing has to be eliminated;²⁸ there has to be a struggle against *prejudices*. In this, modern philosophy is fundamentally different from Greek philosophy: the latter struggles only against

²⁶ Ger.: *Sinnlichkeit*.

²⁷ That is, *Guide of the Perplexed*. Strauss uses the traditional Hebrew title.

²⁸ More or less lit.: removed from the world.

appearance and opinion; modern philosophy's struggle begins prior to that against prejudices. The Enlightenment thus wants to recover Greek philosophy. What does it achieve? It achieves: the freedom of *answering* but not the freedom of questioning, only the freedom of saying No instead of the traditional Yes. (Mortality vs. immortality, chance vs. providence, atheism vs. theism, passion vs. reason.²⁹) But this liberation from the Yes of the tradition takes place by means of a commensurately deeper entanglement in the tradition. For instance, the Enlightenment conducts its struggle against the tradition in the name of tolerance, ultimately in the name of love of neighbor; thus religion is now being based entirely on love of neighbor, in such a way, however, that with the doubt of love of neighbor (as understood by the Enlightenment)³⁰ religion as such becomes altogether doubtful. Or to take an example from a later stage of the Enlightenment: when the Enlightenment becomes openly atheistic and believes it sees through "God" as being a construct of the human heart, the only way it does so is by internalizing the purposes of God into mankind: self-redemption of mankind, self-assurance of immortality (museum, etc.), assuming the role of providence. And if opponents of Enlightenment arise at every stage of it, then these opponents, for their part, take over the successes of the Enlightenment and reconstruct their position in accord with these. (E.g., revelation is understood as being a human product, as morals and as form, not as law; creation is understood not as being the creation of the world, but as what is binding in advance on human beings.)³¹ In general: since the Enlightenment, each generation has *generally* reacted to the preceding generation without questioning the foundation. For example, the concept of the "irrational"—rationalism understood in the narrowest sense.³² {388}

Example: The Problem of Creation

1. God has created the world in complete freedom, out of love; he rules over it in complete freedom—justly and wisely, but in such a way that we are not authorized and not able to know the ways of his justice and wisdom. In his freedom he can perform miracles. Miracles are not in themselves "more divine" than the usual course of the world; but there is no reason for saying that God could not and would not perform miracles.
2. The struggle against miracles in the name of metaphysics: miracles are unworthy of God as the perfect being.
3. Modern physics understands nature completely on its own terms: No scientific proof of God possible. God related to the humanity of human beings.
4. Nature a construct of human intellect.³³
5. By analogy with this construct, the whole of "culture," and with it religion, is understood as a construct of the human mind.³⁴

²⁹ Ger.: *Verstand*.

³⁰ Ger.: *aufgeklärt verstanden*.

³¹ Ger.: *als Vorher-verbindlich über den Menschen verfügt sein*.

³² [Note in margin:] Theory vs. Intuition
Mannheim's Ideology and Utopia {HM}

³³ Ger.: *Verstand*.

³⁴ Ger.: *Geistes*.

6. Novel understanding of the original religious attitude (in contrast to mysticism): the demanding God who summons before him.³⁵ The abandonment of creation remains.

The entanglement in the tradition is further intensified by a *theory* that *legitimizes* this entanglement. While the Enlightenment itself was wholly convinced that history was accidental, that the victorious party was not in the right just because it happened to be victorious, in the nineteenth century the belief that world history is the world's court of judgment becomes dominant. (A belief that can be justified in the natural sciences, where in fact an unequivocal progress, a building on the accomplishments of earlier generations, is possible but that is, at bottom, impossible.³⁶

Thus: the question *πὺς βιωτέον* is hard to answer today not merely on account of the *natural* difficulties, not merely on account of the dominance of a tradition of which we are aware as being a tradition, but on account of our total entanglement in the tradition, which goes so far that we *cannot* express ourselves purely and freely, that every attempt to express and determine what we have seen and experienced is impossible at first. But what then can we do now?)

The struggle against the tradition that leads to the complete entanglement in the tradition, also dissolves the tradition. In every subsequent {389} generation there is *in fact* ever less tradition. The struggle against the tradition was ever again forced to appeal to the *opponents* of the tradition, to those against whom the tradition had arisen and prevailed. Those elements that were supplanted by the tradition reappear (the pagans, Epicurus, vindication of heretics of all types, the sophists, idolatry). These elements became *understood*. The end of this struggle is the *complete rejection* of the tradition: not just of its answers, also not just of its questions, but of its possibilities: The pillars on which our tradition rested, prophets and Socrates-Plato, are torn down since Nietzsche. *Nietzsche's* siding with kings against prophets, with sophists against Socrates—Jesus not only no God, also no charlatan, also no genius, but a moron. Θεωρεῖν³⁷ and “good—evil” rejected—Nietzsche the *last* Enlightener.

The tradition has been shaken at its *roots* by Nietzsche. It has altogether forfeited its self-evidence. We stand in the world completely without authority, completely without orientation. Only now has the question *πὺς βιωτέον* regained its full sharpness. We *can* again pose it. We have the possibility of posing it in full seriousness. We can no longer read Plato's dialogues superficially, in order to notice admiringly that old Plato already knew this and that; we can no longer polemicize against him superficially. And the same with the Bible: we no longer think without evidence that the prophets were in the right; we ask ourselves seriously whether it was not the kings who were in the right. We really must begin *entirely* from the beginning.

We *can* begin entirely from the beginning: we lack any polemical passions against the tradition (we have, after all, nothing from where we could be polemical); and at

³⁵ Ger.: *der Fordernde, vor sich fordernde Gott*.

³⁶ This sentence and the entire next paragraph are enclosed in parentheses in Strauss's ms.

³⁷ Gk.: *Contemplating*.

the same time, the tradition has become completely estranged from us, completely questionable.

But we cannot answer immediately as we are; for we know that we are deeply entangled in a tradition; we are yet much further down than Plato's cave dwellers. We must raise ourselves to the *origin* of the tradition, to the level of *natural ignorance*. If we wanted to concern ourselves with the present situation, we would be doing nothing other than the cave dwellers who describe the interior of their cave.

We have the *possibility*, then, of understanding the origins of our tradition freely: if we make the greatest effort; that is, understanding freely what has always been handed {390} down as more or less *self-evident*. But what is "self-evident" is really³⁸ always *not understood*. This lack of understanding is the final reason why the struggle against the tradition has become possible and necessary. The final result; the *factual ignorance* of the origins (e.g., μεγαλοψυχία—nobility).³⁹

The question concerning the religious situation of the present is no serious topic. The serious thing that is meant by this question is the question concerning the right life. The answer to this question requires not only no special attention to the present situation, but in fact the determined⁴⁰ return to our historical origins, the uncompromising scrutiny of the supposed "achievements" of history.

³⁸ Ger.: *im Grunde*.

³⁹ Ger.: *Vornehmheit*. The Greek *megaloψυχία* means, lit., "greatness of soul."

⁴⁰ Ger.: *entschlossenen*.